



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations

U.S. Census Bureau

4600 Silver Hill Road

Suitland, MD 20746

Attn.: Ms. Enid Santanaortiz (enid.Santanaortiz@census.gov)

November 4, 2019

To the National Advisory Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concern about the need for well-targeted outreach to ensure that people who are not fluent English speakers and who are not proficient readers either in English or in their native language are aware that they can respond to the 2020 Census by phone.

I am writing on behalf of the Coalition on Human Needs (CHN), an alliance of more than one hundreds national scope organizations including human service providers, faith-based groups, policy experts, labor, civil rights, and other advocates concerned with meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable people. CHN has for many years made use of Census Bureau survey poverty, income, health insurance and related data, and has trained thousands of people in accurate use of such data. CHN is a partner in the efforts to ensure an accurate count in the 2020 Census, and has worked collaboratively with the Partnership for America's Children on its Count All Kids campaign to prevent an undercount of young children, and with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Census Counts initiative.

We very much appreciate that the Census Bureau will be providing a phone option for filling out the 2020 census, with 12 separate lines in addition to English in Modern Standard Arabic, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. This is an especially important option for people who do not have home access to the internet, who do not read fluently, either in English or the other languages included, or who have vision difficulties. We are concerned, however, that without radio and television PSA's in targeted communities (and in targeted languages), the people who need the phone option will not know it exists. We urge the National Advisory Committee to prioritize development and dissemination of such PSA's in order to avoid undercounting large numbers of people.

There are nearly 17 million people whose first language is not English and who report not speaking English well, according to the 2018 American Community Survey. The ACS separately reports that 24.8 million adults in the U.S. have not completed high school. Some portion of these adults will not be fluent enough as readers to be comfortable filling out the census form, either online or on paper. For people without adequate reading proficiency, knowing about the phone option through PSA's they can hear will substantially improve participation, and will save in the high costs of in-person follow-up.

It is important to note that lack of reading skills in English and other languages are disproportionately present among low-income people, including the disproportionately poor families with children. In

addition, low-income people are far less likely to have an internet subscription, making online census participation more difficult for them. Overall, 14.7 percent of the U.S. population does not have an internet subscription, but over one-third of those with incomes of less than \$20,000 (37.3 percent, or 6.7 million households) do not have internet access at home. Internet access improves for households with \$20,000 - \$74,999 in income, but still, more than 8.7 million households (16.6 percent) at this income level do not have internet subscriptions. Another [survey](#) of families with school-age children showed that 14 percent of households in metropolitan areas were without an internet connection in 2017 and 18 percent in non-metropolitan areas lacked internet access. About 9 percent of families below the poverty line and 10 percent of Hispanic/Latinx immigrant families had no internet access at home.

Young children were the age group most missed in the 2010 census. In a summary piece for the [Population Reference Bureau](#), William O'Hare and co-authors noted that a higher net undercount of young children is most closely associated with variables related to the percentage of racial/ethnic minorities, percent of households that are linguistically isolated, percent of young children living with grandparent householders, and percent of young children living with non-relatives or in group quarters. From complementary research, we know that heads of such complex households are often unclear about whether it is appropriate to include children living there in the census count. For young children of color and in linguistically isolated families, the difficulties associated with an undercount are compounded: low income, lack of internet access, low education levels and/or low reading proficiency in English or other languages, frequent moves, and greater likelihood of living in a complex household all make it less likely that they will self-report through online or paper means. People of any age in these categories are more likely to be missed in the census count, and young children are especially likely to be missed. Well-targeted radio and TV PSA's in appropriate languages will do a lot to guide people to the phone option. These messages should emphasize the importance of filling out the form, the ease of doing it by phone, and that all children living in the household should be counted.

The vast majority of people who report through the ACS that they speak English "less than very well" are Spanish-speakers – there are more than 16 million in this category. We also note that more than one-quarter of U.S. children are Hispanic/Latinx. An accurate census requires specially targeted outreach to ensure that those who either have reduced online access or do not read well in English or Spanish know that there is a phone response option and how to make use of it. We strongly urge that NAC recommends a robust, well-targeted PSA effort on appropriate media, teamed with outreach to trusted messengers, including making the PSA recordings available for their use. The recorded messages can be used in waiting rooms for various services, in religious settings, in schools, etc. The more vigorous the outreach using these materials, the less the Census Bureau will have to rely on in-person follow-up.

While Spanish speakers are the largest share of people for whom English is not their first language, there are substantial numbers speaking other languages. For example, over 1 million people speak Modern Standard Arabic at home, of whom more than one-third say they don't speak English well. It is very helpful that the Census Bureau has responded by including a phone line for Arabic speakers; targeting of audio announcements to Arabic-speaking communities will ensure that more people know of this option.

The distrust of government among immigrant communities means that outreach is all the more important if we are to get an accurate count. That means using all possible communications tools, and

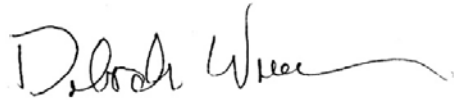
recognizing that online or paper messages in print will not reach large numbers of people who are not fluent readers in any language and/or who do not have ready access to the internet.

People with vision difficulty would also especially benefit from audio messages to direct them to a phone option for census response. Among people age 18 or older with incomes below twice the poverty line, nearly 3.3 million people have vision problems.

With problems such as high distrust and difficulty in hiring census workers, it is critically important to reach people with effective messages to encourage filling out the census form. We urge the National Advisory Council to recommend a well-targeted investment in radio and TV PSA's to educate people about the phone response options, and to work with the Census Bureau's communications contractors to ensure that language usage is appropriate and easily understandable, and that messages most likely to encourage an accurate count of children, immigrants, and communities of color are designed.

Thank you for your work to improve the census 2020 count, and for your attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Weinstein", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Deborah Weinstein,
Executive Director